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One Planet Residency: Perspectives on Globalisation and Education

Introduction by *Laura Colucci-Gray & Donald Gray* (Editors)

We are pleased to be writing the editorial for this special issue of *Sisyphus* “One Planet Residency: Perspectives on Globalisation and Education”; as we are approaching the end of the year 2014, the Earth has completed another revolution around the sun.

Never before humanity has been so literally “in touch” with the Earth as a global space. From communication technology to travel, consumption of goods and production of waste, humanity has effectively claimed ownership of the Earth’s ecosystems and resources. As Steffen, Grinewald, Crutzen and McNeill (2011) have come to define this geological epoch, we now live in the era of Anthropocene, a time characterised by profound alteration of the biogeochemical cycles:

Conversion of natural ecosystems to human-dominated landscapes has been pervasive around the world; the increase in reactive nitrogen in the environment, arising from human fixation of atmospheric nitrogen for fertilizer, has been dramatic; and the world is likely entering its sixth great extinction event and the first caused by a biological species (p. 850).

As never before, the ability of human beings to describe and manipulate the Earth’s energy and material flows has been so great to have significantly

altered the social and biological processes sustaining life on the Earth. However as Steffen et al. (2011) maintain, the recognition of the role of human species as agents of global, bio-physical changes come with greater responsibilities which perhaps unsurprisingly, our current social systems are struggling to meet. Humanity finds itself facing an unprecedented scenario located largely outside the range of past experience. The sheer complexity of the Earth functioning systems challenges common notions of predictability or what may count as reliable knowledge. What we handle instead are “models” and “scenarios”; which are highly dependent upon cultural and value-based assumptions about what might be acceptable levels of risk or uncertainty (Rockström et al., 2009).

The researchers who have described the epoch of the Anthropocene are concerned about the role of the public in such global transition. The concept of Anthropocene and the debates about its origins and significance have been confined almost entirely to the research community. Will the public be willing to accept it as a construct? And most importantly, what sort of considerations will be taken into account in making decisions which will be high stakes and contested? The new scenarios ahead are set to challenge existing modes of living. We are set upon a trajectory of transformation and change that is so substantial that most of consolidated knowledge and deeply held beliefs about how the world operates may become outdated in a non-distant future.

As Descola (2012) interestingly puts it, the modes of energy production and consumption inevitably reflect the relations that any society establishes with humans and non-humans forms. Through “relational modes” or “schemas” the types of interaction between humans can be replicated at different levels between humans and nature and they become established as cultural norms. In the particular case of Western societies, the “need” imperative has given rise to an economy of demand, predation and exploitation of resources to fuel a particular form of economic development. As a biological species we have socialised ourselves into a model of consumption (Dale & Shove, 2000) which regulates our personal interactions from the simpler forms of digital communication to the more sophisticated aspects of education and general imagination (McGregor, 2014). The ability to frame and understand every day, physical and practical actions as part of broader cultural discourses yields important implications for education.

Changing from a pattern of predation to a pattern of mutuality and co-existence requires developing a profound understanding of what it means to be human: biologically, we are wired up with the cycles of the bio-geo-chem-

ical elements (Carbon, Nitrogen, Oxygen etc.) which are recycled and transferred across the organic and the inorganic realms of the Earth, sustaining the living communities and storing toxic elements. Indeed through the act of living, breathing, feeding, our bodies become the means through which we enter in communication with Life as a whole, being both and at the same time the transient points of accumulation and release of the global flows of energy and materials, in a relationship of exchange and interdependence with Gaia.

A view of humanity that is not separate from the global context, in relationship and in connection with a range of living and non-living processes challenges traditional views of the Earth. From a view which confines and separates we can move to a view which sees subjects and objects in-relation, tangled in stories of co-transformation. This view on being human is the view of process and change, or *phronesis*, an experience of living which is embedded in time and place (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Tilley, 2007), and the world being observed cannot be separated from the observer. As indicated by Ingold, “the ways in which we act and interact with materials should be taken seriously, since it is from them that everything is made” (2011, p. 31), and this includes ourselves. Indeed as Ingold continues, the properties of materials are not attributes which can be categorised, confined and defined, but histories, from which our narratives of development unfold.

The implications of this view are ethically and educationally substantial: acquiring one planet residency means recognising that reciprocity regulates our lives. However that we are not able to perceive the full extent of the impact and consequences of our actions in everyday life, begs for an interrogation and understanding of the role of the educational processes. Educational practitioners and researchers alike are confronted by a set of important and taxing questions: How far does education take account of perspective of inclusion and co-existence with other human communities and living forms on the Planet that we all share? In what way does an understanding of inclusive, equitable and sustainable relationships raise awareness of common assumptions about what the kind of education that is desirable and required?

The contributions included in this special issue of *Sisyphus* engage with such examination by looking closely at the tacit assumptions that are regulating social and educational systems; the extent to which such assumptions have contributed to the sedimentation of a worldview which has proved to be unsustainable and provide some suggestions for moving away from a destructive path towards new and desirable scenarios. The five papers contained in this issue



bring together perspectives from the North and the South of the world; interrogate different aspects of the relationship between globalisation and education and altogether, provide an informative overview of current and topical reflections on education for a “one planet residency”.

In order of appearance, the special issue opens with the paper authored by Donald Gray and Laura Colucci-Gray who describe the role played by science and technology in shaping common views of nature in the West and the “integrative schemata” (Descola, 2012) according to which a powerful technoscientific enterprise is elevated as the means for fuelling economic growth. The authors deconstruct the epistemological and ethical assumptions governing techno-science and argue for a more sophisticated understanding of the complex ways through which humans can enter in relationship with the world. A position of humility is advocated as a means to develop a form of community-based science which takes the Earth as the ultimate place for ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to lead a life of value. Such a shift is based upon the idea of respectful dialogue with other humans and non-human life forms.

Vanessa Andreotti develops further the range of “integrative schemata” or “discourses” which permeate current models of unsustainable development. She illustrates the implications of dominant views of development and progress as linear trajectories managed by technocratic systems seeking to manipulate and to normalise, erasing surprise, and with it, also the possibility of participation and dissent. Andreotti brings forth the role of critical literacy as a means to recognise how different decisions serve particular agendas and values, thus revealing the need to disclose suppressed knowledge, languages and subjectivities. In addition, critical literacy has also a creative role, enabling people to ask questions about how could life projects develop otherwise, according to alternative imaginations which may develop from other narrative and linguistic roots, the “forgotten” or “silenced” ones.

Moving to the realm of education, Walter Humes further develops the power of critical literacy for interrogating the impact of globalisation on education, by disclosing the narratives of power, control and domination which have penetrated the structures of educational systems worldwide. His contribution stresses the importance of recognising the influence of narratives on shaping behaviours and expectations thus seriously questioning the ability of educationists around the world to re-think the aims and purposes of education.

Donald Gillies deepens such reflection by providing a detailed account of the historical and cultural basis of the origin of the concept of “social capital”

which has become an established form of thought in education. Gillies skillfully retraces the concept to its early origins, the time of the great economic and technological acceleration in the United States which incidentally, Steffen et al. (2011) take as the starting date and driving force of the Anthropocene. In Gillies's paper we see the power of narratives at work: the concept of social capital has clear roots origins in the neoliberal mentality which promoted the ongoing accumulation of goods and services to sustain a materialist society striving for infinite growth. The concept of social capital is revealing of the narratives which have permeated educational systems worldwide and which elected the educational systems as the driving force of capitalist, post-industrial economy. A transition towards a one planet residency requires shedding acquired concepts and forms of thoughts. New narratives require new languages.

Finally, Ana Paula Caetano and Isabel Freire illustrate three projects with distinct methodologies, each one advocating the values of participation, interdependency and responsibility amongst human communities. The authors explicitly recognise the levels of cultural, personal and structural violence which are embedded across social and educational systems and the need to promote fundamentally dialogical, inclusive and relational competences. As the authors remarked "to think and to investigate the relationship between education and citizenship implies questioning the means and the ends, clarifying which kind of citizenship is intended and which kind of society we want to construct". In this process, teachers and students and educators at large are tasked to engage with both reason and affect: getting involved with social change is a material, corporeal and emotional investment, at the service of the communities in which we live.

The papers brought together in this special issue have the clear mission of weaving a critical understanding of globalisation across educational systems and beyond specific disciplines or levels of education. This special issue of *Sisyphus* calls upon the need for educationalists to engage further and in a more connected and sustained way with the challenges of providing a sustainable path for living in the Anthropocene: is one planet residency with boundaries which are not so clearly defined. What are the attitudes and experiences required to build a safe operating space of humanity?

Laura Colucci-Gray
Donald Gray



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